

YĀSKA'S NIRUKTA:
THE QUEST FOR A NEW INTERPRETATION

(1) Habitually reckoned among the classics of Sanskrit literature, Yāska's *Nirukta* is nevertheless scarcely read and little appreciated in modern Indology. Some reasons for this rather puzzling state of affairs will be focused upon in this article. Convinced that a valid representation of the universe of Yāska can be attained only by approaching the *Nirukta* through terms and thought patterns that are clearly indigenous, I shall suggest a possible way of arriving at an interpretation of the text on its own terms. Such an approach might help us to appreciate the authority of the *Nirukta* in the Indian tradition and encourage further research on the text.

(2) As is well known, the *Nirukta* is a treatise primarily dealing with the analysis of words. In principle it is a commentary on a list of words, the *Nighaṇṭu*, the earliest lexicographical work that has survived in India. The words listed in the *Nighaṇṭu* are mainly Vedic¹, and the bulk of Yāska's work is accordingly devoted to analysis of abstruse Vedic words. A special section is devoted to names of Vedic divinities. In keeping with his principle that a word should not be explained in isolation, but only with regard to context, Yāska comments upon hundreds of Vedic stanzas. Moreover, the *Nirukta* contains lengthy discussions of linguistic and philosophical import. That Yāska was part of a longer tradition is settled beyond doubt by the text of the *Nirukta* itself, although our knowledge of his predecessors consists in what can be drawn out of a few scanty remarks and quotations². These aspects

1. It should, however, be noted that the *Nighaṇṭu* contains some words not found in the Vedic vocabulary. An example is *nīram* «water», probably of Dravidian origin, listed under *udakanāmāni*, *Nigh.* 1.12.

2. Authors of the *nairukta* school mentioned in Yāska's text have been dealt with by BISHNUPADA BHATTACHARYA, *Yāska's Nirukta and the Science of Etymology*, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 62-96.

establish the work of Yāska as an early treatise within the Indian linguistic-exegetical tradition. It seems only fair to regard such a text as a valuable source of information for different branches of modern indology.

(3) Interpretation, however, is a question of language and of how language is used. When the text of Yāska's *Nirukta* became accessible through the *editio princeps* established by Rudolph Roth in 1852³, Sanskrit scholars in Europe were deeply immersed in the discoveries of comparative philology. Unfortunately, they set out to study the *Nirukta* with the ideas of this field in mind, taking it for granted that similar ideas were at work also in the mind of Yāska. In this way heavy presuppositions were involved in their interpretation of the text. In fact, they made Yāska look like a predecessor in the field of historical linguistics. The *Nirukta*, accordingly, appeared as a kind of diachronic linguistic study mainly seeking the etymology or history of a given word. Later, this interpretation was more or less adapted by Indian scholars as well, foremost among them Lakshman Sarup, and it has kept its position up to the present day. It is even retained, perhaps unconsciously, by modern day paṇḍits like Shivanarayana Shastri⁴, the circle of inter-cultural transposition thus being complete. Ironically, it was just the discovery of the Sanskrit language that provided European philologists with the necessary material for developing the ideas of comparative philology. To my knowledge the only scholars who have clearly objected to an « historical » interpretation of the *Nirukta* are K. Kunjunni Raja⁵ and, more thorough in adducing evidence in support of his view, Johannes Bronkhorst⁶.

That such an interpretation has been allowed to pass unchallenged until now is surprising, since it is not at all in keeping with basic Indian views concerning language. When analysing a denotative item of the language, Yāska links it to one or more actions or activities regarded as inherent in the thing denoted. But concepts like « development » and « linguistic change » involving the concept of time, were probably not active in Yāska's mind. The language he studied was regarded as *daivī vāk* « divine speech », as such timeless and, at least in some meanings of the term, eternal (*nitya*; *siddha*). It is not surprising, however, that the « historical » interpretation was bound to entail a decreasing interest in the study of the *Nirukta*. After all its so called etymologies had been

3. *Jāska's Nirukta samt den Nighaṇṭavas*, herausgegeben und erläutert von RUDOLPH ROTH, Göttingen, 1852.

4. Cf., e.g., SHIVANARAYANA SHASTRI, *Nirukta ke pāṇca adhyāya (1-4 tathā 7 adhyāya), ṛju-vivṛti nāmaka vyākhyā sameta*, Delhi/Varanasi, 1972. The « historical » interpretation runs like a scarlet thread throughout the book.

5. K. KUNJUNNI RAJA, *Etymology and interpretation in ancient India*, in « Dr. V. Raghavan Shashtyabdapurti Felicitation Volume », Madras, 1971, pp. 180-82.

6. J. BRONKHORST, *Nirukta and Aṣṭādhyāyī: their shared presuppositions*, in IJJ, 23 (1981), pp. 1-14.

valued as « sound » or « absurd » from a modern point of view, and the value of the *Nirukta* as an aid to elucidating the obscure contents of Vedic hymns had been turned down, there was not much more to do.

While falling a victim to comparative philology, the study of the *Nirukta* was simultaneously thrown into the shade by the study of the seemingly superior Pāṇiniyan tradition. Even such a connoisseur of the Indian grammatical tradition as Paul Thieme has judged the work of Yāska as « ein Rückfall in schlimme linguistische Kinderkrankheiten »⁷. It should be noticed, however, that no Pāṇinīya has regarded it beneath his dignity to make use of the *Nirukta* as an authoritative source. This fact is clearly recognized by Thieme himself: « Patañjali, dem das *Nirukta* natürlich bekannt ist... lehnt sich nicht nur im Ausdrucksstil, sondern auch in der Erklärungsmethode eng an Yāska an »⁸. We also see that a commentator like Helārāja relies on the authority of Yāska when defending one of Bhartṛhari's definitions of the concept *dravya*⁹. As a matter of fact, Yāska has been treated with the utmost respect throughout the Indian tradition. We should take this as a hint that the *Nirukta* may contain something of value which has not been recognized by modern Indologists and that a new approach to the study of the *Nirukta* might be called for.

It is obvious that a work which sought to interpret abstruse Vedic words and passages, most of them found in the *R̥gveda*, attained a certain authority that could only increase in the course of a long tradition. But this fact alone does not sufficiently account for Yāska's position. We might get a step further by looking at the *Nirukta* from a slightly different angle.

(4) Inquiring into the vast philosophical-religious complex which I refer to simply as the Indian tradition, we are to a great extent left to the resources of texts. These texts found their wording within a tradition deeply engaged in the study of language. Louis Renou went as far as to say: « Adhérer à la pensée Indienne, c'est d'abord penser en grammairien »¹⁰. So, in search of factors affecting development and selection of ideas and concepts within the Indian tradition, we might claim that one such factor is linguistic theory which can be observed and studied as the indigenous means of interpretation.

These linguistic expedients were a convenient implement for any author attempting to interpret older texts in accordance with his own

7. P. THIEME, *Etymologie - einst und heute*, in « Lautgeschichte und Etymologie » (Akten der VI. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft, Wien, 24-29 September 1978), Wiesbaden, 1980, p. 491.

8. In P. THIEME, *Patañjali über Varuṇa und die sieben Ströme*, in « Indo-iranica; mélanges présentés à Georg Morgenstierne », Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 168.

9. *etad evaṃ niruktakāreṇāpy uktam / ada iti yat pratīyate tad dravyam iti* (*Vākyapadīya* of Bhartṛhari with the commentary of Helārāja; *kāṇḍa III*, part 1, critically edited by K. A. SUBRAMANIA IYER, Poona: Deccan College, 1963, p. 187).

10. In L. RENOU and J. FILLIOZAT, *L'Inde classique; tome II*, Paris, 1953, § 1519.

ideas. The interpretations obtained through these means may be regarded as abusive. Still they are psychological realities of the Indian mind. In a striking way the Indian tradition has been able to preserve features from a partly forgotten past. Nevertheless it is the aggregate of ideas conceived and elaborated in the course of a long history that has moulded Indian religion. So even if the indigenous means of interpretation should turn out to be nothing but linguistic devices employed by exegetes and commentators, they are still real components of formulated ideas. If we disregard the indigenous exegesis and the attempts of the tradition at understanding itself, we are at the same time maintaining that the tradition did not develop at all. In this way the prospects of tracing underlying conceptions which determined this undisputedly existent development are dispelled from science.

Moreover, the methods of the Indian *ars interpretandi* have permeated several Asian languages far beyond the Indian borders, above all through the spread of Buddhism. They have penetrated the Tibetan translations from Sanskrit completely ¹¹, and as recently as the 18th century the knowledge of these techniques was still alive in Manchuria when the Buddhist dictionary *Mahāvvyutpatti* was translated into Manchu.

It is thus arguable that these means of interpretation constitute an analytic unit common to the tradition as a whole, a unit reflected in formulated ideas. If we fail to take this unit into consideration, our inquiries into the Indian tradition will to a certain extent be ingenuous in the sense that they disregard relations that are implicit in the languages in which the tradition has expressed itself. For a better understanding of the evolution of Indian thought and of the languages in which it is formulated, the study of the indigenous means of interpretation is thus seen to be important.

(5) An investigation of the texts discloses the fact that the core of linguistic expedients applied in the Indian *ars interpretandi* consists of the means developed by those traditional branches of knowledge known as *vyākaraṇa* and *nirvacana* or *nirukta*. The *vaiyākaraṇa* tradition is fairly well known to us through a number of treatises, of which the fundamental work is the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Pāṇini's grammar. As for the *nairukta* tradition only one single work has survived, viz. Yāska's *Nirukta*.

The basic principle of Pāṇini's grammar is descriptive in the sense that it states rules of grammar by which words are derived in accordance with correct linguistic usage. The task of the *nairukta* tradition was different. It was indeed not simply etymological, in whatever sense we understand this ambiguous term. Yāska's intention was to explain the *tattvam* or «essence» of things by stating explicitly the semantic

11. Suggestive examples are found in NILS SIMONSSON, *Indo-tibetische Studien. Die Methoden der tibetischen Übersetzer, untersucht im Hinblick auf die Bedeutung ihrer Übersetzungen für die Sanskritphilologie*, Uppsala, 1957, especially pp. 238-80.

contents of the words denoting them. It goes without saying that he is not primarily concerned with words that yield their semantic content through a regular morphological analysis, though he is in no way opposed to grammar. Some words, however, do not immediately lend themselves to grammatical derivation, i.e., those words of the language which in the later grammatical literature are referred to as *avyutpanna* « unanalysed ». Accordingly, as stated in the *Nirukta* (4.1)¹², Yāska sets out to analyse « also Vedic words of which the grammatical formation is not understood » (*anavagatasamśkāraṃś ca nigamān*).

Endeavouring to show how a word reveals its hidden semantic content, Yāska elaborated certain methods as well as principles for their application. The results achieved by these means may not correspond to what we regard as relevant linguistic facts. However, it is certainly not our task, on the basis that he was a bad linguist, to erase him from that tradition which employed his methods in a most striking way. Any reader who is not familiar with these linguistic devices will soon meet with textual difficulties. I shall adduce but one example. In Paramārtha's translation of the *Abhidharmakośa* the word *śāstram* « teaching » is rendered into Chinese by *miè jì*¹³. The first word means « destroy », the second « relieve; cross a stream ». Paramārtha has divided the word *śāstra-* into its syllables *śās* and *tra*, relating them to the verbal roots *śas* « destroy; injure » (*śasu hiṃsāyām*) and *tṛ* « cross over; save » (*tṛ plavanataraṇayoḥ*) respectively. From the *nairukta* point of view such a translation does not present any difficulties. On the contrary, Paramārtha's rendering is in perfect agreement with Yāska's statement: *avidyāmāne sāmānye 'py akṣaravarṇasāmānyān nirbrūyāt* « Even when [such] a similarity¹⁴ is not to be found, one should analyse on the basis of [a possible] similarity in syllables or in single sounds » (*Nir.* 2.1). He goes on: *yathārtham vibhaktiḥ sannamayet* « The divisions [into syllables and single sounds] should be interpreted according to meaning ».

A significant remark is made in the same context: *na samśkāram ādriyeta* « One should not attend to the grammatical formation », i.e., when this is of no help in bringing out the semantic content of a given word. Yāska himself characterizes his « branch of knowledge » (*vidyāsthānam*) as *vyākaraṇasya kārtsnyam svārthasādhakam ca* « a comple-

12. In this article, all references to the *Nirukta* are to the edition of LAKSHMAN SARUP, *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta*, Lahore, 1927 (2nd reprint: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967).

13. Taishō 1559, vol. 29, p. 161c (for the Chinese characters I refer to nos. 4483 and 459 in Mathew's dictionary).

14. *sāmānya* = *vṛttisāmānya*. MADHUKAR ANANT MEHENDALE, *Yāska's second rule of derivation*, in « *Nirukta Notes: Series II* », Pune: Deccan College, 1978, p. 60 f., gives the following interpretation: « The word *vṛttisāmānya* seems to mean "commonness of behaviour (of a given sound), i.e. the phonetic change undergone by it". I.e., « similarity with a phonetic change accepted by the grammarians for the explanation of some other forms in the grammar ».

ment to grammar, moreover [something] which realizes its own intentions » (*Nir.* 1.15). As a matter of fact, the combined resources of *nirukta* and *vyākaraṇa* offer later authors a subtle and sufficiently complex means of textual and conceptual interpretation. The methods of *nirvacana* are design features even in such a technical work on Pāli grammar as the *Saddanīti* of Aggavaṃsa. The Tibetans speak of two forms of linguistic analysis¹⁵, *sgra bžin du* « according to sound » and *don bžin du* « according to meaning », which comprise the domains of *vyākaraṇa* and *nirvacana* respectively.

(6) Returning, with this background, to the study of Yāska's *Nirukta* in modern Indology, it is clear that an interpretation which presupposes the existence of 19th century ideas of language in the work of Yāska is liable to throw any realization of it into confusion. In my opinion, the « historical » interpretation of the *Nirukta* may best be described as outlandish. Now it is easy to show off when sitting on the shoulders of giants. To bowl them over would result in a hard fall indeed. Without the works of Sarup, Rajavade and Mehendale, to mention just a few, a new approach to the study of the *Nirukta* would not be possible. Dismissal of the « historical » interpretation definitely does not mean that previous work has been superfluous. The only thing of real interest is this: Provided the « historical » interpretation is rejected, what would a new approach to the *Nirukta* look like?

I have already mentioned the importance of penetrating into the traditional Indian methods of interpreting and elaborating a conceptual system. So it seems to me that an inquiry into the technical methods employed by Yāska makes a favourable starting point. This might also reveal some of the presuppositions underlying his work. Fixed technical methods, i.e., systematically arranged ways of expression applied over and over again, assure us that we deal with thought patterns that can be regarded as valid representations of the implicit models making up the universe of Yāska. An investigation of his technical methods, their mutual relations and their religious, philosophical, and linguistic motivations, may be a first step towards a new interpretation of the *Nirukta*.

(7) Generally speaking, Yāska presupposes the existence of an established harmony between a word and its meaning. In order to make a denotative item of the language yield its semantic content, he tries to specify actions or activities regarded as inherent in the thing denoted. That the words for these actions or activities reflect a verbal element is only natural, and does not imply that it was the sole purpose of Yāska to single out a verbal root when he took up a word for analysis.

Although we know little of Yāska's predecessors, it is at least fairly easy to show that some of his methods reflect thought patterns found

15. Cf., e.g., SIMONSSON, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 11), p. 245 f.

in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. Already in the Vedic *saṃhitā*-literature a dawning consciousness of relations between certain forms of the language can be traced. In the later *saṃhitā*-literature the attempts at clarifying such relations become more conspicuous. An excellent example is *Atharvaveda* 3.13.2:

*yāt prēṣitā varuṇēnc chībhaṃ samāvalgata /
tād āpnod indro vo yatis tasmād āpo ānu ṣṭhana //*

Through a rough translation we get the point: « When driven forth by Varuṇa, you swiftly came rushing along; then Indra got hold of (*āpnōt*) you as you flowed, hence you are waters (*āpaḥ*) thereafter ». The author has obviously seen a connection between the action (*āpnōt*) and the denotative item « *āpaḥ* ». He has even made an attempt at giving his explanation a logical form. He has also made it clear which role is played in the action by the thing denoted, i.e., as agent, object, instrument, etc. In a more explicit way such reflections are frequently met with in the Brāhmaṇas. The example from the *Atharvaveda* reappears in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (6.1.1.9): *yad āpnōt tasmād āpaḥ* « that one got hold of (*āpnōt*) [them], on account of that: *āpaḥ* ». This is clearly a more technical way of expressing exactly the same thought. In the *Nirukta* (9.26) the same analysis is found in the formulation: *āpaḥ āpnoteḥ*.

(8) Even though certain thought patterns seem to underlie all of Yāska's analyses in the sense that he is establishing a relation with an action or activity, only those explanations which are formulated in a highly technical manner can be expected, at least in the first instance, to give sufficiently valid information on the kinds of relations which are sustained between the denotative item, the thing denoted, the action, and the word used to refer to this action. Less technical expressions do not provide us with equally specific information; by way of example (*Nir.* 10.22): *kṛṣṭaya iti manuṣyanāma / karmavanto bhavanti / vikṛṣṭa-dehā vā* « " *kṛṣṭayaḥ* " is a name for human beings: they possess action [i.e., they are active] (*karmavantaḥ*), or: their bodies are stretched out [i.e., they are tall] (*vi-kṛṣṭāḥ*) ».

Within the limits of a strictly bound methodology, however, we observe at least five clearly distinguishable ways of analysing words. To facilitate a general survey, constructed examples are given by means of the word *meghaḥ*:

- 1) **mehatīti meghaḥ*;
- 2) **megho mehanāt*;
- 3) *megho mehatīti sataḥ*;
- 4) **megho mehateḥ*;
- 5) **megho miheḥ*.

According to the « historical » interpretation, all of these highly differing methods are, with only slight variations, to be interpreted: « The word *meghaḥ* is derived from the root *mih* ». In this way the differences are not accounted for at all and the resulting interpretation of the whole work turns out to be practically meaningless. A brief account of some distinctive features of these methods will make this evident.

(9) The first method, exemplified as *mehatīti meghaḥ* « [Having the meaning] " *mehati* (it rains)", [it is called] " *meghaḥ* " », is an instance of the familiar way of expressing a *kāraka-vyutpatti*. The thought pattern underlying it is to a certain extent identical with the one underlying the example from the *Atharvaveda*, where the author did account for the role played by the thing denoted in relation to the action regarded as connected with the denotative item. In a fully developed form, this method must be seen in relation to the *vaiyākaraṇa* analysis of the possible case-relations that can occur in a sentence between a verb and a noun. Such a case-relation is called a *kāraka*, element playing a role in the action that is being accomplished. Any such element (*kāraka*) is assigned to a *kāraka*-category. These, however, are not purely semantic categories separated from syntax. Six such *kāraka*-categories are listed¹⁶. Moreover, a special type of agent is defined, viz., the causal agent (*hetu*). In addition to the *kāraka*-categories mentioned, we also meet with an analysis as *bhāva* « being; becoming; state [of action] ». Furthermore, any verbal noun can be assigned to such a *kāraka*-category even when regarded in isolation. It can thus be interpreted as *kāraka-sādhana*, which I understand as *kārakaṃ sādhayati* « realizing a *kāraka* », or as *bhāva-sādhana*. In the later tradition such *sādhana*-interpretations are common to the extreme. In some cases they are of considerable philosophical consequence¹⁷.

Since Yāska frequently avails himself of such *sādhana*-analyses, a few examples will be adduced. In *Nir.* 5.5, the following analysis of the word *dhanvan-* (*dhānva*, *Nigh.* 4.2.27) is met with: *dhanvāntarikṣam* / *dhanvanty asmād āpaḥ*, « *dhanva*, i.e., *antarikṣam* (the intermediate space between heaven and earth; atmosphere): [Something] flows (*dhanvanti*) from it, viz., water ». Yāska suggests an interpretation as *apādāna-sādhanam*. He wants to make clear how the thing denoted, viz., *dhanva* (given the meaning « *antarikṣam* » by Yāska), is related to the action connected with the denotative item « *dhanva* ». Another example is the analysis of the word *ahar-* « day » (*Nir.* 2.20): *ahaḥ kasmāt* / *upāharanty*

16. Pāṇini defines them in the following order: *apādāna*, *saṃpradāna*, *karaṇa*, *adhikaraṇa*, *karman*, and *karṭṛ* (Pāṇ. 1.4.23 ff.). A general survey is found, e.g., in HARTMUT SCHARFE, *Grammatical literature* (A history of Indian literature; vol. 5: 2), Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 94 f. From the present point of view, it might be useful to compare the simple definitions of the *Kātantra* 2.4.8 ff.

17. By way of example, cf. Śaṅkara in his *Taittirīyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 2.1.1.

asmin karmāṇi, « Why¹⁸ *ahaḥ*? One carries out (*upāharanti*: *upa-ā-hṛ*) [something] in the course of it, viz., actions ». I.e., he gives it an interpretation as *adhikaraṇasāadhanam*. Likewise (*Nir.* 4.27): *grīṣmo grasyante 'smin rasāḥ*, « *grīṣmaḥ* (summer): [Something] is swallowed (*grasyante*) during it, viz., juices ».

(10) As a representative example of the second method referred to above we might adduce (*Nir.* 9.26): *sindhuḥ syandanāt*¹⁹. I suggest the following interpretation: « *sindhuḥ* (the river Indus): on account of the streaming (*syandanam*) ». A phonetic link seems to be established on the basis of the action *syandanam*. The action is referred to by a verbal noun in *-ana*, to be interpreted as *nomen actionis* or *bhāvasāadhanam*, if we stick to Indian terminology. As recorded in the Sanskrit dictionaries most widely used, the verbal nouns concerned are, in many cases, found only in the *Nirukta*. This allows the conclusion that these words are in principle derived by Yāska for a technical purpose.

The denotative item « *sindhuḥ* » is related to the verbal noun in *-ana* through an ablative construction, *-anāt*, explaining why « *sindhuḥ* » can denote the river of the same name²⁰. However, an analysis of this kind gives no explicit information on how the thing denoted is related to the action, i.e., no *kāraka*-analysis is given. In the present case an interpretation as *kartṛsāadhanā* is obvious²¹. In most cases, however, we are left to choose between alternative interpretations. This is important with regard to the later tradition, which is thus free to choose from the set of possible interpretations which exist within the frames of the model set up by Yāska.

A construction of this type is applied to 109 words in the *Nirukta*. As a method of analysis, it seems to be far older than Yāska. It is met with in the oldest Upaniṣads, e.g. in the *Brhadāraṇyaka* (5.7.1): *vidānād vidyut* « on account of the shattering (*vidānam*): *vidyut* (lightning) ». It is also employed in later texts, for instance in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 1.5.41: *yakṣas tu yakṣaṇāt* « *yakṣaḥ*, however: on account of the eating (*yakṣa-*

18. Cf. E. KAHRS, *Yāska's use of kasmāt*, in IJ, 25 (1983), pp. 231-37.

19. A full discussion of this method is found in E. KAHRS, *Bidrag til interpretasjonen av Nirukta*, Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 1980, pp. 52-129 and 149-232 (unpublished thesis).

20. The commentators Durga and Skandasvāmin-Maheśvara frequently refer to constructions of the type *-anāt* as *hetunirdeśaḥ* « explicit statement of the reason ». See, e.g., Durga ad *visravaṇāt* (*Nir.* 5.5) and *virohaṇāt* (*Nir.* 6.3). Cf. E. KAHRS, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-9.

21. Cf. the remarks of Durga: *sindhuḥ kasmāt / syandanāt / sā hy avicchadena viśeṣataḥ syandata iti* « Why *sindhuḥ*? *syandanāt*: for she streams (*syandate*) in a special way by never ceasing to stream ». Note that Durga regards *sindhuḥ* as feminine. All references to the commentary of Durga are in this article to H. M. BHADKAMKAR, *The Nirukta of Yāska (with Nighaṇṭu) edited with Durga's commentary*, vol. I (Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series, 73), Bombay, 1918, and D. G. BHADKAMKAR (*id.*), vol. II (BSPS, 85), Bombay, 1942.

nam)²² ». A different example is Vasubandhu's remark on the word *dharmah* in his commentary on *Abhidharmakośa* 1.2: *nirvacanam tu svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmah* « Now, the semantic analysis (*nirvacanam*) [is]: on account of the holding (*dhāraṇam*) [its] unique particular: *dharmah* ».

Evidently a condensed way of expressing typical Brāhmaṇa-formulations, this method and the chain of thought underlying it are rewardingly elucidated by a fresh look at the analyses of « *āpaḥ* » found in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Satapathabrāhmaṇa* (cf. above, subsection 7). In the latter, the wording ran: *yad āpnot tasmād āpaḥ*. If in the place of *yad āpnot* we substitute the abstract verbal noun *āpanam*, and furthermore put this in the ablative case instead of adding *tasmāt*, we would arrive at the construction *āpanād āpaḥ*. This supports the assumption that the verbal nouns in *-ana* are not merely a way of referring to the abstract verbal root. They contain in an ambiguous form the various specific aspects of action which we can attribute to a verb.

Retaining from his Indian ancestors the idea that a strong connection holds between a name and the bearer of that name by means of an action inherent in the latter, Yāska's emphasis is clearly on semantics. The aspect of magic, however, which is found in the early speculations on language, is not met with in the *Nirukta*. For example, the provenance of the reflections on « *āpaḥ* » in the *Atharvaveda* is a stanza which was supposed to control the course of water. Yāska has no such aims²³.

That the method under discussion had assumed its established technical form within the *nairukta* tradition before the time of Yāska is evident from the fact that this is the only strictly technical method employed by his predecessor Aupamanyava whenever he is quoted in the *Nirukta*. An example is (*Nir.* 2.2.): *daṇḍo... damanād ity aupamanyavaḥ* « *dandaḥ* (stick; punishment)... "on account of the taming (*damanam*)", according to Aupamanyava ». Lakshman Sarup²⁴ gives the following translation: « "The word (*daṇḍa*) is derived from (the root) *dam*", says Aupamanyava ».

That the « historical » interpretation is better consigned to oblivion and that Yāska intends to bring out what I, somewhat naively, call the semantic content of a word, becomes undisputably clear by the following instance (*Nir.* 2.15): *raśmir yamanāt*. Here it is difficult to trace any

22. *yakṣanam* for *jakṣanam*, according to the commentary of Ratnagarbhabhaṭṭa (*Viṣṇupurāṇa with Ratnagarbhabhaṭṭa's commentary Vaiṣṇavākūṭacandrikā*, Bombay, śaka 1811/A.D. 1889-90): *jakṣa bhakṣaḥasanayor ity asya varṇavyatyayena jakā-rasya yakārah* « The syllable *ya* [occurs] instead of *ja* through transmutation of sounds, with reference to the statement [of the *Dhātupāṭha*]: "the root *jakṣ* [occurs] in the meanings 'eat' and 'laugh' " ».

23. Cf. BRONKHORST, *op. cit.* (supra note 6), subsection 3.2.

24. L. SARUP, *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta* (English translation), Oxford, 1921, p. 23 (repr.: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967).

phonetic link between the two words whatsoever²⁵. Nevertheless, this is one of the examples adduced by Siddheshwar Varma²⁶ when he states: « Some etymologies of Yāska shock the philologist on account of their absurdities, as they wildly go against the fundamental laws of phonology ». This, however, is no « etymology » at all.

As a commentary on the *Nighaṇṭu*, the *Nirukta* displays some rather peculiar features. Of the five chapters which make the *Nighaṇṭu*, the first three are hardly commented upon at all. This fact led earlier *Nirukta* scholars to draw some hasty conclusions. A representative remark is given by Sköld²⁷, who concludes his reflections on the problem in the following way:

« As far as I can see, these facts corroborate the conjecture which has been put forth elsewhere viz. that the first three books of the *Nighaṇṭu* have been amalgamated with the other parts of the same work only in a relatively late period ».

This feature, however, is easily explained if we only realize that Yāska first and foremost was concerned with the semantic content of the words he analysed. The first three chapters of the *Nighaṇṭu* contain groups of synonyms. Each group is headed by a word which indicates the meaning common to all the words of the group. Accordingly, Yāska had no reason to analyse each and every word of the group. He had, on the other hand, every reason to analyse and determine the meaning of the *adhikāra*-word.

In the *Nighaṇṭu* (1.5) we find 15 words grouped under the heading *raśmināmāni*. The statement *raśmir yamanāt* is made from a purely semantic point of view. Yāska is simply telling us that *raśmiḥ* can be used as the *adhikāra*-word of *Nighaṇṭu* 1.5 because it has the meaning *yamanam*, a meaning which is common to all the 15 words of the group. The entire passage of the *Nirukta* runs (2.15): *raśmināmāny uttarāṇi pañcadaśa / raśmir yamanāt / teṣām āditaḥ sādharmaṇāni pañcāśva-raśmibhiḥ*. We are forced to interpret: « The following 15 [words] are names for *raśmiḥ* "ray; rein". *raśmiḥ* [is the *adhikāra*-word of the group] on account of [the meaning] *yamanam* "restraining". Among these [15 words], the first five are simultaneously denoting horsereins ».

This interpretation is supported by the seemingly redundant analysis *stotā stavanāt* (*Nir.* 3.19). The grammatical derivation of *stotṛ-* is so completely regular that no further analysis seems to be called for (cf. Pāṇ. 3.1.133: *ṛvultr̥cau* « [The affixes] *ṛvul* (-aka) and *tr̥c* (-tr̥) [are introduced after roots if an agent (*karṭṛ*) is to be denoted] »). However,

25. This problem is discussed more thoroughly by KAHRS, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 19), pp. 61-76.

26. S. VARMA, *The etymologies of Yāska* (Vishveshvaranand Indological Series, 5), Hoshiarpur, 1953.

27. HANNES SKÖLD, *The Nirukta. Its place in old Indian literature. Its etymologies*, Lund, 1926, p. 178.

the wording (*Nir.* 3.19) *stotṛnāmāny uttarāṇi trayodaśa / stotā stavanāt*, shows to better advantage if we interpret: « The following 13 [words] are names for *stotṛ* - "one who is praising". *Stotā* [is the *adhikāra*-word of *Nighaṇṭu* 3.16] on account of [the meaning] *stavanam* "praising" [in this group of words] »²⁸.

Constructions of the type *-anāt* can thus be observed as referring exclusively to the semantic content of a word²⁹. This fact should make us cautious even in the instances where a phonetic link seems to be established. To regard the analyses of Yāska as formal grammatical derivations out of hand is apt to lead one astray.

(11) The three remaining methods referred to above have at least one feature in common. All three expressions terminate in a case-form which is not immediately clear. According to the « historical » interpretation it is ablative, the interpretation « derived from » being taken for granted. The method exemplified as **megho mehateḥ* presents a 3. sg. pres. act. form of the verb as a noun declinable as a masculine *-i*-stem. This method is by far the most common in the *Nirukta*. In a very few instances, however, the analysis is given the form **megho miheḥ*. In this case the verbal root is turned into a noun directly by means of the suffix *-i*. Both of these constructions are sanctioned as valid ways of referring to a root by Kātyāyana (ad Pāṇini 3.3.108, vt. 2: *ikṣṭipau dhātunirdeṣe*).

However, a more extensive way of expression is also met with in the *Nirukta*. The word *meghaḥ* « cloud » is analysed in the following way (*Nir.* 2.21): *meghaḥ kasmāt / mehatīti sataḥ*. A finite form of the verb (*mehati* « is raining ») is made into a nominal expression by means of the words *iti sataḥ*. Not more than 25 words are analysed in this

28. This interpretation is supported by the commentators. Cf. the following remarks of Durga: *ya eva medhāvināḥ ta eva stotuṃ śaknuvantīti medhāvināmabhyāḥ uttarāṇi stotṛnāmāni / kiyanti punas tāni / trayodaśa / katamāni punas tāni / « rebhaḥ jaritā kārūḥ » - ity evam ādīni / rebho rebhateḥ stutyarthasya / jaritā jarateḥ stutyarthasyaiva / kārūḥ kartā stomānām / ity evam ādī yojyam / pratyakṣavṛttitvād asya śabdasya noktaṃ stotā kasmād iti* « Only those who are *medhāvināḥ*, only those are able to praise. Accordingly, after *medhāvināmāni* (*Nigh.* 3.15), [it is said:] *uttarāṇi stotṛnāmāni* (the following are names for *stotṛ*). How many, then, are these? *trayodaśa* (13). Which, then, are these? [They are] *rebhaḥ*, *jaritā*, *kārūḥ*, etc., as [listed in *Nigh.* 3.16]. *rebhaḥ* is related to *rebhatiḥ* which has the meaning of praising (*stutiḥ*). *jaritā* is related to *jaratiḥ* which has just the meaning of praising. *kārūḥ*: he is a performer of *stomāḥ* (praisings). In the same way construction is to be carried on [for the rest of the words of the group]. Since the derivation of this word is obvious, it is not said: "*stotā kasmāt* (why *stotṛ*-?)". The genitive forms *rebhateḥ* and *jarateḥ* are cautiously interpreted as « related to ». Cf. *infra* subsection 12 and note 35.

29. These constructions do also occur as additional semantic elucidations to analyses of the type *mehateḥ*. Cf. KAHRs, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 19), pp. 110-24. Examples are (*Nir.* 2.15): *diśaḥ kasmāt / diśateḥ / āsadanāt / api vābhyāsanāt*, or (*Nir.* 4.2): *pāśyā pāśasamūhaḥ / pāśaḥ pāśayateḥ / vipāśanāt*.

way³⁰. They are, however, all found in the *Nighaṇṭu*. Eight of them are *adhikāra*-words and five are names of divinities. This indicates that we are dealing with a basic means of analysis which is given as clear a formulation as possible.

A thorough investigation discloses some interesting features: 1) The crucial instance (*Nir.* 3.13) *grhāḥ kasmāt / grhṇantīti satām*, admits of no doubt: the analysis is expressed in the *genitive* case, not in the *ablative*. 2) That *sat-* follows not only the number but also the gender of the word being explained is evident from (*Nir.* 2.18) *uśāḥ kasmāt / ucchatīti satyāḥ*, and (*Nir.* 4.16) *vāṣīti vānāma / vāśyata iti satyāḥ*. These facts leave no room for the « historical » interpretation. The relation between the word analysed and the analysis is to be conceived of as being far more than just a reference to an abstract verbal root. This offers new and interesting prospects of interpretation.

Yāska's immediate intention with an analysis of this kind is obvious: he wants to express a delimitation of possibilities with regard to *kāraka* interpretation by interweaving a *kāraḥ* into an analysis which is highly technical also in every other respect. By way of a few examples this will be clear: *karma kasmāt / kriyata iti sataḥ* (*Nir.* 3.1); *mṛtyur mārayatīti sataḥ* (*Nir.* 11.6). The word *karma* is connected with *kṛ*, but in the passive: *kriyate* « it is accomplished ». The word *mṛtyuḥ* « Death » is connected with *mṛ* « die », but causatively: *mārayati* « it causes to die ». A mere reference to their root elements and affixes would not necessarily bring to light their full semantic content, although both words lend themselves to complete grammatical derivation as given in the *Uṇādisūtra* (4.144 and 3.21 in the *pañcapādī*, 6.73 and 1.135 in the *daśapādī*). (Cf. Pāṇ. 3.3.1: *uṇādayo bahulam* « [The affixes] *uṇ*-etc. [occur] promiscuously »). The *Uṇādisūtra* seems to derive « *mṛtyuḥ* » in the sense of *maraṇam* « death; dying »³¹, which results in an interpretation as *bhāvasādhanaḥ*. But Yāska explains « *mṛtyuḥ* » in the sense of « Death ». Only an interpretation as *hetusādhanaḥ* (*mārayati*) would disclose the function of the god of death.

The purpose of analysing *meghaḥ*, the *adhikāra*-word of *Nighaṇṭu* 1.10, is, in other words, to express the interpretation as *kartṛsādhanaḥ* through the finite verb *mehati*. The relation sustained between the denotative item and the analytical expression poses, however, a difficult question still to be settled. Turning to the commentary of Durga, we meet with the following remarks on Yāska's analysis of *meghaḥ*: *āha — meghaḥ kasmāt / ucyate — mehatīti siṅcaty asau / evaṃ kartari kārake sataḥ asyaitad abhidhānam bhavati megha iti* « He (Yāska) says: *meghaḥ*

30. A full discussion is given by KAHRS, *op. cit.* (*supra* note 19), pp. 130-48 and 233-50.

31. According to the edition of Yudhishtira Mimamsaka [*Daśapādyuṇādivṛtti* (The Princess of Wales Sarasvati Bhavana Texts Series, 81), Benares, 1943, p. 89, note 6], two mss. give the v.l. *mriyante janā aneneti*, which would give an interpretation as *karaṇasādhanaḥ*.

kasmāt? It is said: "*meghaḥ*" occurs as a denotation of that (*asya*) "which is (*sataḥ*)" such, in the sense of *karṭṛ* as far as *kāraka* is concerned, "that one says (*iti*)": "*mehati*", i.e., it sheds water». Apart from acknowledging an interpretation as *karṭṛsādhanaḥ*, Durga seems to avail himself of the word *asya* to make it clear that *sataḥ* is to be conceived of as a nominalizing factor in an expression which is a possible semantic substitute for «*meghaḥ*». The word «*meghaḥ*» is a denotation of that which occurs in the sense «*mehati*».

Now, the analyses of Yāska seem, in general, to presuppose an ideal linguistic system, where an internal game of relations between the linguistic elements is at play, i.e., relations within a closed universe lacking the aspect of time. This, as well as the fact that Yāska uses the genitive case when giving synonyms (e.g., *Nir.* 2.5: *gaur iti prthivyā nāmadheyam* « "*gauḥ*" is a denotation of the Earth ») might be of importance for our understanding of the *iti sataḥ*-construction.

Bearing these observations in mind, I suggest the following preliminary interpretation of the analysis *meghaḥ kasmāt / mehatīti sataḥ* (*Nir.* 2.21): «*Why meghaḥ?* [It is a denotation] of something being (*sataḥ*) such that one says (*iti*): *mehati* ». The genitive, then, is expressive of a relation which makes *mehatīti san* a possible substitute for the word *meghaḥ*. In the place of «*meghaḥ*», we could say «*mehatīti san*» without changing the semantic content. Such a use of the genitive would be identical with the one applied by Pāṇini in connection with the concepts *ādeśa* «substitute» and *sthānin* «substituend». Cf. Pāṇ. 1.1.49: *ṣaṣṭhī sthāneyogā* «A sixth [case ending, i.e., a genitive, denotes the] relation [of occurring] instead of [something which tentatively occurs]». (This is a metarule which operates in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* when no other genitive relation applies by context). Inquiries into the concepts *ādeśa* and *sthānin*, undertaken by Paul Thieme³² and Albrecht Wezler³³ respectively, disclose such a use of the genitive even outside the *vyākaraṇa* tradition³⁴.

32. P. THIEME, *Ādeśa*, in «Mélanges d'indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou», Paris, 1968, pp. 715-23.

33. A. WEZLER, *Marginalien zu Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī I: sthānin*, in KZ, 86 (1972), pp. 7-20.

34. A speculative but definitely more pregnant interpretation of an analysis like *megha mehatīti sataḥ* would be: « "*meghaḥ*" [is a denotation] of something which actually exists (*sataḥ*) in the meaning of (*iti*) "*mehati*" ». However, such an interpretation requires deeper investigation. Nevertheless, it is a striking fact that Pāṇini uses *iti* to indicate that the linguistic item preceding it denotes the meaning of that item. E.g., in 1.1.44: *na veti vibhāṣā*, where *iti* refers to the meaning of «*na vā*» (cf. 1.1.68: *svaṇi rūpaṇi śabdasyāśabdasaṃjñā*). Kātyāyana (vt. 3 ad 1.1.44) states: *itikaraṇo 'rthanirdeśārthaḥ* «The use of *iti* is in the sense of reference to meaning». For the interpretation of *sataḥ*, cf. Patañjali's use of the word in connection with his discussion of the view that linguistic items and the relation between them and their meanings are *nitya* «eternal; permanent». See, e.g., the edition of F. KIELHORN, *The Vyākaraṇa-mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, vol. I, Bombay, 1880, p. 40: 26-27; p. 60: 21-22; and, especially, p. 158: 6-8 (the 3rd edition, revised by K. V. ABHYANKAR, Poona, 1962, has the same pagination).

(12) Now, it is my hypothesis that such forms as *mehateḥ* and *miheḥ* are genitives as well. But this is a delicate matter. Attributes which serve to elucidate expressions of this kind are few. Moreover, the few that are met with seem to be given in the genitive as well as in the ablative case. The question is whether these are relevant linguistic facts or if this mess is a result of damage done to the text. As is well known, textual problems are abundant in the *Nirukta*. The commentators, however, seem to prefer the genitive interpretation, a conclusion to be drawn from the fact that they give numerous attributes in the genitive case³⁵.

The following observation might also be of importance. In *Nir.* 12.5, the word *uṣas-* is treated as denoting a goddess belonging to the heavenly sphere: *uṣā vaṣṭeḥ kāntikarmaṇaḥ / ucchater itarā mādhyamikā*. The last part of the statement, though, refers to *uṣas-* as belonging to the middle region, i.e., to the word *uṣas-* occurring *Nighaṇṭu* 5.5. Now, in the context of *Nighaṇṭu* 5.5., Yāska's only remark on *uṣas-* is (*Nir.* 11.46): *uṣā vyākhyātā « uṣāḥ is [already] explained »*. This must refer to the one and only analysis given, viz. (*Nir.* 2.18): *ucchatīti satyāḥ*. When Yāska (*Nir.* 12.5) *en passant* gives the analysis *ucchateḥ* by referring to the same *uṣāḥ*, it is evident that he can substitute an analysis of the *iti sataḥ*-type with an analysis expressed by the artificial verb-noun in *-teḥ*. Provided these forms in *-teḥ* are genitives, we could put forward the hypothesis that an analysis of the type *-teḥ*, at least from one point of view, is to be interpreted in the same way as an *iti sataḥ*-analysis with the exception that an interpretation with regard to *kāraka* has to be supplied. It should, however, be kept in mind that we are dealing with elliptical ways of expression which are to be cautiously treated in relation to the metalanguage of Yāska as well as to the possibilities of interpretation and subtle conceptual distinctions provided by the later tradition. Analyses of the types *mehateḥ* and *miheḥ* can also, at least from the point of view of the later tradition, be conceived of as more or less formal analyses on a highly abstract level. The question is: how abstract? Was the precise concept of the abstract verbal root expressed by an artificial verb-noun of the type *mehatīḥ* also in Yāska's mind, or did he sense a finite verbal form in it?

(13) The purpose of inquiring into strictly technical methods is to clarify valid expressions of the thought patterns making up the universe of Yāska. If the ablative/genitive-dichotomy could be settled, we would know more about Yāska's view on the relation between a noun and a verb, or between an entity and an activity, as well as his views concerning substitution, change, development, causality, etc. But all the time we are

35. E.g., *Nir.* 1.7: *dakṣiṇā dakṣateḥ samardhayatikarmaṇaḥ* and *Durga: dakṣiṇā dakṣateḥ samardhayatyarthasya*; *Nir.* 1.9: *akṣi caṣṭeḥ* and *Durga: akṣi caṣṭeḥ paśyatyarthasya; et passim*. Cf. *supra* note 28.

faced with the problem of the incommensurability of Indian concepts with concepts indigenous to our own tradition. By way of example, to what extent do concepts like « meaning » and « referend » correspond to the Indian concepts « *artha* » and « *śabda* »? I have in this article frequently stressed the central role played by an « action » in the semantic analyses of Yāska. But even the term « action » is ambiguous, i.e., it has no clearly corresponding term in Sanskrit. It is interesting that Yāska seems to use « *karman* » in this sense. The meaning of a verb (*ākhyāta*) is also indicated by « *karman* » in the *Nirukta*, in the form of a masculine *bahuvrīhi*, e.g., **mehatiḥ secanakarmā* (cf. note 35). These are some of the problems that present themselves. Until complete illumination is achieved, however, the following features seem a favourable starting point.

In the *Nirukta* (1.1) Yāska characterizes a verb in this way: *bhāva-pradhānam ākhyātam* « That which has *bhāva* "being; becoming" as its essential element [is called a] verb ». Nouns (*nāmāni*), on the other hand, are said to be *sattvapradhānāni* « those which have *sattva* "substance" as their essential element ». Now all predications can be conceived of as aspects of *bhāva*. And *bhāva* can refer to an action viewed in process, as *vrajati* « is walking », *pacati* « is cooking », as well as to abstract nouns, where the *bhāva* is « in the form of a substance, compact from the beginning and until the end »³⁶, as *vrajyā* « a walk », *paktiḥ* « a cooking ». Some aspect of action is fundamental to Yāska's semantic elucidation of a denotative item of the language. The verbal nouns in *-ana*, employed in a technical way by Yāska's predecessors as well as by himself, also lend themselves to an interpretation as *bhāvasādhanāni*. An approach which involves the thought patterns of relativity and identity, qualifier and qualified, might shed some light on the complex problems of the *Nirukta*. Different forms of relativism are certainly a distinctive feature of the Indian tradition.

36. *upakramaprabhṛtyapavargaparyantaṃ mūrtaṃ sattvabhūtaṃ* (Nir. 1.1).